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Bard

RIDDLE

1.

What hides inside itself or another?

what spoils if it doesn't spill?

What advantage hath the miller?

What color is a country's dust?

(Where does a riddle live between the time you hear it and the time you know the answer?)

What is the sensory perception of the schoolboy taking a calculus exam?

What does a body call its own?

(Some thigh or my?)

What does a peacock think?

2.

What, hides inside itself or another?!

What, spoils if it doesn't spill?!

What, advantage hath the miller?!

What, color is a country's dust?!

What, is the sensory perception of the schoolboy taking a calculus exam?!

What, does a body call its own?!

What, does a peacock think?!

3.

Yet though I answer not I love thee.

Lo, the questioner fails the question,

Lo, the answer waits

Shimmering like Damascus in the lower air,

The space of the answer is a house to live
All right I'll say it, move right in,
I have given you a little cotton bag
Sewed shut, and in it is all my dust,
Amazing that a man as coarse as I
Could delicately sort together so many grains
Each one a teleported quantum who
Knows everything he knows and will tell you
Only in time, words are only time, that's
What time is or time is for, to unpack
One by one the living knowledge of each particle.

I come from the country where riddles rise,
Flow down through the chest and arms and answer themselves.

9 March 2003

I heard this music long before,
Young Jewish women in the grocery store
Talking politics while the counterwoman
Adds up their bill on paper bags,
Politics of love and does she love him.
I shuffled awkward selecting my cheese,
Liederkrantz or something nameless yellow
He would cut for me when he was done with them.

Each argument falls in love
With its silent answer.

Inevitability.
All silence emits a fated word.

10 March 2003

To write a word
All the way to its end.

To be there
When it gets there.

To fall into its arms.

10 March 2003

LOVE POEM

And to be sure
of another thing,
wait for it
tasting of oranges and prunes

—why do I want to say
'semaphore' all the time,
to probe that I have arms
good for something or
can read across the sea? —
hold me, I need it
now — being brief
if need be, need me.

And to be sure
the word I will not say
holds you to me
rapt in listening to the unhearable

sound of a taste in my arms.

10 March 2003

SECRETS OF DESIRE

I want you to know everything. I'm tired of you not knowing me. I want you to know what shoes I'm wearing. I want to explain the choices I made getting dressed this morning. I want to explain my three new theories about the War against Iraq. I want you to smell the soap I used, here are my hands, smell my chest here, the same soap, bayberry, green. The anti-Semites who rule America and much of Europe have picked on the one Muslim country regarded with fear and suspicion and religious distaste by all other Muslim countries, namely Iraq of the atheist communist degenerate Baathist Saddam Hussein; going to war with Saddam Hussein will force Muslims to mount a massive retaliation. But they can't nuke Cleveland. What will they do? Muslims everywhere will strike against the target they have been trained to detest for fifty years, namely the State of Israel. All sides will delight in the destruction of Judea, especially the American oligarchs, who will no longer have to foot the bill for troublesome Israeli dependency, and will have a peaceful Middle East to siphon oil from. I like the way the grey-green shirt looks under the dark blue vest, the colors work, even if the texture of the shirting is odd, same-colored windowpanes, a screen through which no window comes. Why do designers make fabrics they themselves don't like? You can tell. It is the sense of power it gives them, their ability to impose something ugly that people all over the world have to wear. It's only clothes meant for the poor that show stupid ugly patterns and shitty colors, to make the poor look poor and graceless no matter how many new clothes they buy. It is not that the poor have bad taste but that the designers are punishing the underclass. Designers reserve even ordinariness for their masters, the affluent. And al Qaeda threatens to destroy the United States bit by bit, with slow remorseless acts of terrorism, unless we destroy Saddam Hussein, that heretic and secularist. The US recognizes al Qaeda is made up of fanatics; fanatics are men of principle, and they'll keep their word, so the US complies and attacks Saddam Hussein. We don't mind this, but we are afraid of al Qaeda because they have principles and we have only profits. So we do what they want, we do their work for them. Black pants. I've been wearing black pants for days, one of several pair, one made of a tough jeans

material, one hard but smooth, looks navy blue in some lights, looks good over my thighs and defines the bones of the kneecap, one really black polartec, I'm wearing those today, just indoors or to walk around the neighborhood, I wish I could tell you everything I think about. All the people. People I know and people I think about. The United States and China are preparing to do battle for the hegemony of Middle Eastern oil. The United States pretends to be fighting Saddam Hussein, to get itself in position and actually occupy the Gulf. The French, whose Elf oil company owns important contracts with Iraq, and their allies the Germans mobilize world opinion against America, to destabilize American oil supply, so that the Chinese, the quiet superpower, will be able to take over the Emirates and Iraq, as they have been preparing to do with years and years of political and economic support. I want to tell you everything. It is important that you know what I want, every inflection of my will, my desire. I don't much like chicken, it always seems slimy to me. Only when the white meat is very well cooked, then it's ok. I'm wearing soft grey woolen socks. They look good with the dark brown ankle-high slip-ons.

10 March 2003

A PAPER FOUND IN THE ICE

Dear summer
sincerely yours
warm hot fall colors
I *am*, me.

End of *this*, *end of any* body.
Body of weight
Buddhism knows the
end, *elegant* finish of
this interesting
experience:
to be, to pass, elapse,
expire.

Busy precepts
line up swift life —
be useful, be helpful
be saved.

Change very
way, manner, method
remember, memorize
double times.

10 March 2003 (found 9 III)

VS DEPRESSION

Inside your body one hundred gods and goddesses are living right now, each with his or her retinue of attendants, messengers, eternal devotees. These beings live on your life energy, which they in turn nurture and enlarge, constantly renewing your vision, your sources of amazement [which is the quality of always being startled by each thing you see] and wonder [which is the quality of puzzling long and hard about the origin and purpose and meaning of each things you see] and reverence [which is gladness at heart that these things are as you see them], and these are the three most potent allies of the soul.

Inside your body the gods and goddesses want pleasure. Their pleasures are many, far wider than you'll ever directly know, but you and your deeds and your moods are conduits of their delectation. Every pleasure you take feeds them, and every hour of moping dismay saddens them. They owe you life, and you owe them delight. Dismay is doubting them. Dismay is living with the idea that you are alone.

In fact you are never alone. This is the hardest thing to know, but it is so.

Wear bright clothes, because gods are colors, and feel happiest amidst their own. Learn things all the time, because gods are curious. Make things, because gods yearn to multiply the instances of the world, to multiply universes, every haiku an epic stretching out to galaxies unknown.

Depression is the sin against the Holy Ghost—who is one of the few gods mentioned in the impoverished theology of the western imagination. But most of the gods are wounded by depression, and take their revenge on their depressor by wounding the quality of his life.

If you want a higher quality of life, exult. If you are depressed, apologize to the gods and put on silks and satins, go dancing, above all be nice to people who have nothing to give you.

This is the point. If you want the world to be good to you, you have to be good to the gods inside you, who are the inhabitants of your world. If you want the world to feed you, you have to start by feeding yourself.

EVEN THESE

Even these things remember
to have been here
when the morning sunlight
stroked the majolica umbrella stand
in the dark corner

an idea waking up from the long
dream of preparing to do, *samskara*,
dream in the potter's fingers
waiting for the clay to be wet enough
to walk around the wheel

a memory, a feel, a splay
of sun on painted flowers, each
alone and nothing lonely,
great human glory of pretending
to be somewhere in specific

a moment while time is gone.

11 March 2003

TO CATCH UP

To catch up with somebody else
without being yourself — ah, that
is Phaedra and Thermopylae,
Kant and Descartes holding hands
like two little boys in Kolkota,
all the things we need to be,
spirit-guides, ouija boards, calculus,

you never know what you need to know
till it's way too late to learn it.
Then prayer is your only hope, or dreams.
Or staring at the sun on snow and knowing
it's all right: something knows what I don't know.

Because you're not yourself, you've
left behind all your ignorances,
your sexy guesses, your bizarre conspiracies.
You're no one now, but not two either,
and you're full of light. But what is light full of?
The soft sleep that wakes the world.

11 March 2003

SENTENCE 1

Always trying to run away
from the street you're born in
because a name sticks like a disease
and you hurry out of the sickroom of identity

to what is that out there,
with Sufis goofing among roses, no hoses,
no horses, everybody is where they are already,
who are you?

12 March 2003

SENTENCE 2

If you could lift from the cellar door
the thin living patina of morning dew
sparkling on the green enamel
would that be specific enough
for the likes of you or would we
need Fokkers landing at Tempelhof
and torchlight processions to the museum
ready to burn down everything that isn't right
and nothing is right and you run out of fire
could you wake up please and say a different prayer?

12 March 2003

WANT

Want to say without seeing
as a wave wants over the shore

without changing itself from pure
form writhing through the elastic medium

changing nothing but the moment of touch
when one system falls hard in the arms of another

or sun rises automatically wonderful
giving someone the quiet to hear that occasion.

13 March 2003

PRAYER

Now all I can see
is what is there
a diamond bereft
of its axes
who used to be me

I am laughing at you, Lord,
you used to be so like me
and now you are absolute again
nimble and alien and sturdy
like a new book I hold in my hand

but what language are you written in
Lord, what animal bit me in the night?

13 March 2003

AN AD READ IN DREAM

So in this ad for leprosy
the sly small beautiful hill people face
said leper before I even read the text,
I knew it was she
or she had it
and then the words began all round her
asking for money in that quiet
dignified way of ads for hopeless conditions
quoting great writers, explaining how 'molecular leprosy'
(I knew they meant 'tubercular' but an ad is an ad,
a dream is a dream) is the worst kind leprosy
but can be helped if you and I send money to
this sad sly delicate Burmese face
who does not yet show the ravage of her ill
but whose elegant precarious beauty
hints sideways at the gloomiest tomorrow.

13 March 2003

The squirrel is hanging from the feeder
and I think about things.

Morning. Clarify my motivation
for this day. Let the five women
each a different color
easy access to the sky of my head.

O come in you who are always already there,
tell me what I need to forget to begin.

Red. Blue. White. Green. Yellow.

But is this thinking, to see colors
walking in the sky, to be wordless
as a lump of coal, loving, frightened,
ready, young? Why am I always so young?
I always seem to wake before the world.

13 March 2003

But why can't I write everything?

I want the harsh light of a Mobil station

at 3 a.m. glaring on the most beautiful woman I have ever see

and what the world does about it to bring us together if it does

and where we went from there and where we are

because we still are, nothing changes, the light so yellow

almost green, the thundersuck of semis passing at 80

and her face dope serene in inner moonlight

our whole life beginning again, trees

around us, every highway pieces sacred groves,

always the same forest, we are near as trees,

we still are but we are separate as trees, a root is a permanent

intelligence, I can't get any closer to you than the light.

13 March 2003